

Statement from Department of Human Services General Manager Hank Jongen

- We are not able to discuss the details of a matter that is presently before the Court nor, due to privacy considerations, will we discuss these individual customer cases publicly.
- The department has offered to reach out to customers directly where it is appropriate for us to do so.
- The Commonwealth Ombudsman has independently and exhaustively reviewed the earned income compliance program.
- After reviewing the processes around the department's debt recovery, the Ombudsman found it is reasonable and appropriate to ask people to explain discrepancies in data matching with other agencies.
- The Ombudsman's 2019 report shows we have significantly improved the way we communicate with people to ensure they better understand the way debts are calculated and have greater access to support if they wish to have a debt reviewed.
- The report shows complaints have reduced considerably since 2017 because of the work that has been done to enhance our processes.
- There has also been a decrease in the number of debts that are later reduced.
- Letters are sent to customers asking them to explain discrepancies. These are not debt letters.
- No debt notice is issued until the person has been afforded ample opportunity to assist with explaining and resolving the discrepancy.
- Debt recovery is a fundamental principle of our welfare system – when someone has a debt, the department is legally obliged to pursue recovery of the overpayment.